



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 12, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We very warmly welcome Ambassador Douglas Davidson back to the PC and thank him for his report, but in particular for his very thoughtful remarks and observations. This seems to us the way reports should be delivered. We all can read the text in advance, but what is particularly helpful and fruitful is the enhancement of that report by remarks such as Ambassador Davidson has just delivered.

I think we need to underline two points today, which we would certainly like to, and that is: It is twelve years since Srebrenica. I think of the word anniversary as a celebration, and I certainly do not think what happened twelve years ago is in any way a celebration, but rather a disgraceful event.

And the second point with regard to that would be to underline what Ambassador Davidson said on that subject. That was a very, very short time ago, it shows you what dreadful things can happen in such a short period of time in history, and our work becomes even more serious about preventing such events from happening in the future.

We are concerned that the political climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina has deteriorated significantly since the national elections in October 2006. In particular, we note with regret that the Bosnian officials have yet to conclude a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union because Bosnia has not fulfilled the conditions laid out by the EU. We are also troubled by increased nationalistic rhetoric from politicians across the political spectrum, which undermines efforts to help Bosnia and Herzegovina transition into a fully-functioning, stable, multi-ethnic state. In this regard, we welcome the July 2nd statement of the new High Representative, Ambassador Miroslav Lajcak of Slovakia, warning against any activities or statements that push Bosnia and Herzegovina back into an atmosphere of tension and hatred.

Continuing the reform process in Bosnia and Herzegovina is critical for the future of this country and its citizens, and for stability in the region. Toward this end, the OSCE Mission helps strengthen the institutions of government at all levels. For example, the democratization program has made important strides in developing and strengthening the State Parliamentary Assembly, including increasing the involvement of citizens in the legislative process. Programs like this, along with "Open Parliament," develop trust and

transparency between the public and their representatives.

The Mission's security work has been essential to consolidating democratic and civilian control of the military. It has also been very successful in eliminating and controlling small arms and light weapons.

We appreciate Ambassador Davidson's thorough report on the important work on education being done throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is an area that directly affects the future of the country, and we urge Bosnia's politicians to follow the Mission's lead and seek to develop an educational system that will have a lasting, positive impact on Bosnia's citizens.

The Mission's continuing rule-of-law work is vital to democratization efforts, and we applaud Ambassador Davidson and his team for the emphasis placed on this area. We also support the Mission's focus on the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes as a crucial part of its human-rights program.

We believe that Bosnia would benefit from increased regional cooperation among prosecutors on war crimes cases, including facilitating witness testimony across borders and sharing evidence with neighboring countries that have prohibitions against extraditing defendants.

We again emphasize that the transfer of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic to The Hague is essential for regional reconciliation and full Euro-Atlantic integration. The Republika Srpska's cooperation with the ICTY has improved, but the Republika Srpska must continue to do more to work with regional partners to locate the remaining fugitives and root out their support networks.

While war crimes issues are understandably integral to domestic politics, politicians must not exploit or manipulate them for political gain. We support the Mission's focus on the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes as an important part of its human-rights program.

Regarding the OSCE's overall footprint in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we take note of and support Ambassador Davidson's proposal to take a comprehensive look at the structure of the Mission to ensure that it is in line with current needs. In particular, we welcome the consolidation of the regional centers, and note that perhaps this may be an area where further streamlining can occur. We recognize the Mission's important monitoring function outside of Sarajevo. It appears there are two approaches that could be taken in this regard: eliminating the regional centers, functions as middle-men between the OSCE field offices and the headquarters in Sarajevo, or eliminating some field offices and consolidating their activities in larger urban areas in regional centers. Perhaps in your reply you could comment on these two approaches, Ambassador Davidson, and which option you prefer.

The United States supports Bosnia's leaders in efforts to reconcile and move Bosnia and Herzegovina towards a European future. To accomplish this, the reform process must be carried forward, and stable, lasting and transparent institutions must be developed and supported. We commend the OSCE Mission for its important work toward this end, and wish Ambassador Davidson and his team continued success in their endeavors.

Thank You, Mr. Chairman.